

Three researchers in Southern California say they have conclusive evidence that Joseph Smith used a stolen novel in his compilation of the Book of Mormon.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is based on Smith's teachings, denies the accusations.

The charges are not new. The research is.

The issue is crucial to the Mormons, who claim the 522-page Book of Mormon to be the divinely inspired, correctly translated Word of God.

The charges came to light this week in an article written by Edward Plowman for Christianity Today, the evangelical fortnightly. Plowman is the magazine's news editor.

"Ever since the Book of Mormon was first published in 1830, its origins have been disputed," says Plowman. "As Joseph Smith, the founder of the rapidly growing church, tells it in official church writings, the book is a miraculous translation of 'reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics' on golden plates he dug out of a hillside near Palmyra, N.Y., a village between Rochester and Syracuse, in 1827.

"But as some of his contemporaries and a number of modern critics have alleged, the book is at least partly the pirated work of Solomon Spaulding (or Spalding), a reformed Congregationalist minister and novelist who died near Pittsburgh in 1816."

Plowman says, "Until now, the critics'

case has rested on circumstantial evidence (such as) similarities of style and subject matter, and testimonies of perhaps biased persons claiming to know of a relationship between Smith and another man who may have had access to a Spaulding manuscript."

The new research was done by Howard A. Davis, Donald R. Scales and Wayne L. Cowdrey. Their findings are contained in a new book to be published by Vision House.

The researchers obtained enlarged copies of several original manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon from the Mormon archives in Salt Lake City. These copies, along with authentic specimens of Spaulding's handwriting, were submitted to three prominent handwriting analysts with impressive credentials.

"Working independently, and unaware of the Book of Mormon connection, all three analysts concluded that Spaulding had written all the material they examined," Plowman reports.

The three experts are Howard C. Doulder, William Kaye and Henry Silver, all of Los Angeles.

"The manuscript section in question is part of the so-called Kimball acquisition of 22 pages of First Nephi, as dictated by Smith to 'an unidentified scribe,' according to Mormon historians," says Plowman. "Smith used a number of scribes in his work, producing more than 4,000 words a day for between 65 and 90 days, according to a Mormon authority. Two manuscripts were produced. One, the edited printer's copy, is in the archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Missouri. Smith placed the original manuscript in the cornerstone of a house in Nauvoo, Ill., in 1841. In 1882 a wing of the house was torn down and the contents of the cornerstone were scattered. Mormon member Sarah M. Kimball in 1883 obtained the most legible of the remaining pages from the man who married Smith's widow. Other pages — about 120 — and fragments were obtained later."

The forthcoming book and Plowman's story dwell heavily on the credentials of the handwriting experts who examined the Kimball acquisition.

The three are presented as first-rate. "All are in private practice, are nationally recognized experts in examining questioned documents, and are often called on to testify in court cases," says Plowman. "Doulder formerly was a document examiner for the Milwaukee police department and the U.S. Treasury Department, and he has served as chairman of the Questioned Document sections of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the International Association for Identification. Kaye's clients have included many large business firms, the Michigan attorney general's office, and Scotland Yard. Among the thousands of cases the internationally known Silver has been involved in is the dispute over the Howard E. Hughes estate."

Of the three opinions, only Silver's is unqualified. The other two say they can

# Researchers say

# Book of Mormon

# based on novel

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only be "positive" if they examine the original manuscripts and not the copies.

Mormon press spokesman Don Lefevre issued the following statement about the findings: "The authenticity of the Book of Mormon has been challenged by many during the past 147 years. The so-called Spaulding story was long ago laid to rest by even the most credible of critics. The book has held up under other attacks over the years and will withstand the latest allegations as well. Truth is unchanging, and the truth of the matter is that the Book of Mormon is precisely what the church has always maintained it is. It is divinely revealed scriptural record of ancient American people. More specifically, it joins with the Bible as a witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ."

Dean Jessee, a church historian who categorized the various manuscript remnants, said, "Any competent handwriting analyst will easily spot numerous differences in the two hands. In fact, even the untrained eye can see the basic differences."

Plowman asked a Mormon leader if the Church would submit the manuscript for handwriting analysis. "We don't need to," Plowman quotes the "spokesman" as saying. "We know where the manuscript came from." But he quotes Lefevre as saying it would be okay for the three handwriting experts to examine the original manuscripts.

Plowman says he went to Salt Lake City and was shown the original manuscripts by Mormon historian-editor Leonard J. Arrington. He says each page of the manuscript is now laminated.

"The Kimball-acquisition pages, ragged at the edges, are a little over six inches wide by 16 inches long, and the paper seems to be uniform in stock and age," says Plowman. "They are written on both sides in black ink, and appear to be in sequence, although the handwriting seems to differ from section to section."

"Jessee has tentatively assigned two of the sections to John Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, close associates of Smith who were among the 'witnesses' to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The other section is the one that Jessee says was written by an 'unidentified scribe' — but which the handwriting experts have identified as the work of Solomon Spaulding. (The experts have not examined the other two sections.)"

After observing all three sections, Plowman says about the current charges: "Since Spaulding wrote at least 14 years or so before Smith began dictating, the

casual observer is left wondering how there can be so much similarity in paper and ink quality throughout the Kimball acquisition.

Plowman says "The Book of Mormon is basically the story of two migrations of people from the Middle East to the Americas, the first from the Tower of Babel about 2250 B.C., the second from Jerusalem about 600 B.C. American Indians are portrayed as descendants of one of the immigrant families, the Lamanites, who were cursed with a dark skin because of sin."

"Moroni, the last survivor of another family, the Nephites, who alone used the 'reformed Egyptian' language and who was preached to by Christ after his resurrection, in 421 A.D. buried a set of plates on which his father Mormon had inscribed a record of the migrations and struggles. Fourteen hundred years later, Moroni delivered the plates to Smith, according to Mormon teaching."

"Large chunks of the Book of Mormon are passages from the King James version of the Bible. Anthropologists and archaeologists have generally scoffed at the historical sections of the book, and they say there never has been such a written or verbal language as 'reformed Egyptian,'" says Plowman.

He says, "no one but Smith ever saw the gold plates (Moroni took them away after making sure the translation was correct), and he usually dictated from behind a curtain."

Plowman says the Spaulding writings are not the only ones sometimes alleged to have been pirated by Smith.

"Some critics cite similarities between what Smith produced and what James Adair wrote in his History of the American People (Long, 1778)."

Plowman says "those who believe Smith made use of a Spaulding manuscript usually implicate a Baptist-turned Campbellite preacher named Sidney Rigdon, who officially converted to Smith's new faith shortly after it was founded in 1830. Several sources indicate that both Spaulding and Rigdon moved to the Pittsburgh area about 1812. Spaulding left a manuscript of a novel known as "Manuscript Found" at a Pittsburgh printer. It subsequently disappeared. The novel reportedly attempted to portray a biblical origin of American Indians."

"Friends of Rigdon are on record saying he showed them such a novel," says Plowman. "And they say that Rigdon had a close friend who worked at the print shop where Spaulding's novel had been left."

"Rigdon served as pastor of a small Baptist church in Pittsburgh from about 1820 to 1823, when he was ousted in a controversy over doctrine. He drifted back to Ohio where he became identified with the Campbellite movement and its emphasis on 'restoration' of the true church, a prominent theme in the Mormon faith. Anti-Mormon researchers believe Rigdon met Joseph Smith in his travels in the later 1820s. Several sightings of Rigdon and Smith together are reported in documents, but so far no hard evidence of such a link has been uncovered."

Plowman reports that in 1884 a Spaulding manuscript was found. Its title was "Manuscript Story." He says it contained some parallels to the Book of Mormon but no verbatim passages.

Plowman says, "Mormon leaders later announced that 'Manuscript Story' and 'Manuscript Found' were the same manuscript, thus dismissing the alleged Spaulding link to Mormonism. Anti-Mormon students, claimed, however, that they were two different works. Spaulding's daughter, Matilda, claimed there were two different manuscripts. She said she had heard her father read from 'Manuscript Found' and that it contained many of the names and references mentioned in the Book of Mormon."

One question remains: "If the California handwriting experts are correct (and part of 'Manuscript Found' has indeed been found — incorporated in the Book of Mormon and safely stored by the Mormon Church — why would a scribe insert the Spaulding pages themselves into the manuscript instead of rewriting them?"

Plowman tells of another problem with a Mormon document.

He says in 1968 one of the Mormon's respected scholars, Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson, was asked to translate the then-discovered Joseph Smith Papyri fragments, which had been the basis for the Book of Abraham in Smith's Pearl of Great Price. The fragments dated to 100 A.D. or earlier and are glued to heavy paper bearing handwritten notations by Smith.

Nelson discovered, according to Plowman, that the text was part of an ancient pagan ritual of death and not what Smith had "translated" in the Book of Abraham.

The church refused to publish Nelson's translation (which was corroborated by other Egyptologists), and in 1975 Nelson resigned from the Mormon Church.

"It is not my fault that the papyri did not say what Joseph Smith claimed they did," Nelson says.